

England Parish Chest Records

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Why Parish Chest records?

Additional records were kept for each parish that went beyond christenings, marriages, and burials. Parish Chest records were also recorded and kept in a parish chest within the church that had a lock to keep the records safe. Parish Chest records contain a wealth of genealogical information. They generally cover the time period from 1662-1834 when the New Poor Law was enacted.

Types of Parish Chest records

The Vestry

The main parish council made up of members of the parish. They had power to make by-laws on “matters of public concern.” Could require the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor – to have their expenditures brought before the Vestry for approval.

- **Vestry minutes** - Minutes of the Vestry which was the presiding council of the parish. Can mention newcomers to the parish, appointment of parish officers, etc. They also contain information about the poor in the parish.

The Churchwarden's

The Churchwardens oversaw the maintenance of the parish and collected church rates and pew rents. They also reported any wrongdoings to the bishop or magistrate which included not attending church, not providing relief to the poor, or any other disagreeable behavior.

- **Churchwarden Accounts** – Contains the minutes and business of the Churchwarden's. They are helpful because they often survive when other poor law records may not. They may contain information found in the records of the Overseers of the poor.
- **Church rates** - Rates collected from those living in the parish to care for the upkeep of the church, churchyard, and other parish needs. Lists the names and sums paid by each householder for the church. Recorded on a yearly basis.

- **Pew rents** – Members of the parish could rent pews so their families could occupy the same pew for each service. Those unable to afford pew rents would have to stand or take advantage of free pews provided by charitable donations.
- **Churchwarden Presentments** – Churchwardens were required to present offenders against ecclesiastical law to the archdeacon or bishop at least once a year. They could also make voluntary presentments at any time.

The Overseers of the Poor

The Overseers of the Poor were selected to administer the Poor Law. They managed the parish funds to help those in need. They would collect rates from those living in the parish to help finance the costs of relief.

- **Poor rates** - Lists the names and sums paid by each householder for the poor rate or church rate. Recorded on a yearly basis. May trace when a family left or entered a parish.
- **Settlement certificates** - Certificate given to identify the legal residence of an individual or family. Given to heads of families when they moved from their parish of legal settlement. Can name family members.
- **Settlement examinations** - Determines a person's legal residence if no settlement certificate is given. Was necessary to qualify for parish relief. Helped to determine financial situation. Gives useful information.
- **Removal orders** - If the settlement examination proved the parish was not their legal residence, they were removed from that parish, if considered to be a liability to the parish, and sent back to their legal parish for assistance. Names family members.
- **Bastardy examinations** - If a woman became pregnant out of wedlock, she would become a liability to the parish, and they would have to take care of her and the child's finances. An examination was given to determine the father of the child.
- **Bastardy orders** - If the father was named, an order was issued to bring him in. If he refused to marry the woman, he would need to sign a bond for the maintenance and care of the mother and child.
- **Apprenticeship indentures of paupers** - Children of widow's, poor families, or orphans were apprenticed out at the expense of the parish to masters who might give them a trade. This would alleviate the parish of any further expense for the child. May name the father.

How to Access Parish Chest Records

While there are many Parish Chest records online, there are still many that are only available in County Record Offices and in Archives in England. Here are key websites to access Parish Chest records:

www.familysearch.org	www.findmypast.com	www.ancestry.com
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sign into your free account.2. Go to Search, then Catalog.3. In the Place search type in the name of the parish and then click Search.4. Click "Church records," or Poorhouses, poor law, etc."	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sign into Findmypast.com.2. Click Search.3. Click "All record sets."4. In the search box type, "Settlement," "Bastardy," "Removal," "Examination," "Apprenticeship," etc.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sign into Ancestry.com.2. Click Search, then Card Catalog.3. In the Keyword(s) search type, "Settlement," "Bastardy," "Removal," "Examination," "Apprenticeship," etc.
discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk	Search Online	County Records/Archives
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Go to the website.2. In the Search box type in the name of the County and then add a keyword like "Settlement," "Bastardy," "Removal," "Examination," "Apprenticeship," etc., i.e. Worcestershire Settlement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Select a search engine2. Type in the name of the parish or County and add words like "Poor law," "Settlement," "Bastardy," "Removal," "Examination," "Apprenticeship," etc. after the name of the parish.	<p>If it is not online try contacting the local county record offices and archives in England.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do an online search of the name of the County and then add "Record Office" or "Archives."

To Learn More

To learn more about England Parish Chest records, visit the FamilySearch Wiki at wiki.familysearch.org and in the search box type, "England and Wales Poor Law Records Pre-1834."